

RE: B.P., H.A., and S.H., INDIVIDUALLY AND ON BEHALF
OF ALL OTHERS SIMILARLY SITUATED
v. CITY OF JOHNSON CITY, et al
CASE NO. 2:23-cv-00071-TRM-JEM

DOES PRESS CONFERENCE

2/6/24

COURT REPORTING AND VIDEO SERVICES

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1 MS. VANESSA BAEHR-JONES: Good afternoon. Thank you for being
2 here. I'm Vanessa Baehr-Jones, and I represent survivors
3 of Sean Williams who are suing -- corruption, negligence,
4 and gender discrimination which allowed Sean Williams to
5 rape women and children for years with impunity. On
6 August 25, 2023, the city manager for Johnson City, Cathy
7 Ball, gave a press conference. She said she was there to,
8 quote, "be transparent" about the City's response to our
9 lawsuit. She then proceeded to blame Sean Williams'
10 victims for what had happened to them. She used legal
11 terms like comparative fault to turn the focus of this
12 case away from Sean Williams, a serial rapist, and the
13 Johnson City Police Department's corruption, and instead
14 to publicly shame the survivors of his crimes. As soon as
15 she was finished with this press conference, my phone blew
16 up. I will never forget the anguish and betrayal I heard
17 in the voices of my clients that day. One of the great
18 tragedies of this case is that the very institutions and
19 individuals who are supposed to be protecting and serving
20 these women continue to fail them again and again,
21 continue to breach their trust, and instead of protecting
22 them, continue to do them harm. But even amidst the
23 anguish of that day, I also heard resolve. In just a few
24 minutes, you will hear from members of the group of
25 survivors who have come together to fight back against

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1 these injustices, and there is power in this group. Not
2 only are each of these individual women tremendously brave
3 and courageous, but they are standing here together,
4 supporting each other, and insisting on speaking the truth
5 about what happened to them. Tragically, it was all too
6 easy for police to silence the voices of Sean Williams'
7 victims as they came in one by one to report his crimes.
8 It is a lot harder to silence a chorus of voices. This is
9 the first time since this lawsuit was filed that anyone
10 from the Plaintiffs' team has spoken publicly. That is
11 because there is a local court rule that prevents lawyers
12 from facilitating public statements while a case is
13 pending. After Cathy Ball's press conference though, we
14 thought it was important for us to take a stand against
15 the City's bully tactics, and we took this matter to
16 court. We asked the court to stop Cathy Ball from blaming
17 the victims in this case. We also asked for relief from
18 the local rule so that we, the representatives of Sean
19 Williams' survivors, and other survivors whom JCPD failed,
20 could respond publicly. We won that motion. And after
21 months of litigation, the court granted us permission to
22 hold this press conference to respond to Ball's victim
23 blaming. Here with me today are Heather Collins and
24 Elizabeth Kramer, two attorneys who are part of the team
25 of lawyers taking on Johnson City in this litigation.

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1 Heather Collins is the founder of HMC Civil Rights Law.
2 She has decades of experience fighting on behalf of crime
3 victims and is a distinguished civil rights attorney in
4 the state of Tennessee. Elizabeth Kramer is one of the
5 founding partners of EKO Law, a national class action law
6 firm. She brings expertise in fighting and winning large
7 class action lawsuits against institutions on behalf of
8 survivors of sexual violence. I am honored to lead this
9 team. They will both share remarks.

10 MS. HEATHER MOORE COLLINS: Good afternoon. I'm Heather Moore
11 Collins, and I also represent the survivors in this
12 lawsuit. Victims of sexual violence are some of the
13 bravest people I have ever met, and the women in this
14 lawsuit are no exception. They have persevered despite
15 going through the unimaginable. I've stood by women in
16 this case when they were informed by the FBI that there
17 were videos and images of them being raped. Some had no
18 idea that this had happened to them. Some only had fuzzy
19 memories. And let me tell you, when City Manager Cathy
20 Ball stood up at a podium just like this and blamed our
21 clients for the crimes of violence that were perpetuated
22 against them, she continued an absolutely deplorable
23 pattern of rape culture that has been perpetuated by the
24 City of Johnson City for way too long. Rape culture
25 normalizes and perpetuates sexual violence by victim

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1 blaming and victim shaming. Victim blaming includes
2 perpetuating beliefs that victims of sexual assault bear a
3 responsibility of the fault related to their sexual
4 assault. This can include blaming them for what they
5 wear, whether or not they drink alcohol, whether or not
6 they took drugs, whether they were at a particular place
7 or time. This type of victim blaming and shaming prevents
8 them from reporting their assaults because they think they
9 will not be believed or that they will be blamed for their
10 assaults. Victim blaming perpetuates the very culture of
11 impunity that allowed Sean Williams to terrorize the
12 Johnson City community for years. Victim blaming also
13 robs victims of the opportunity to heal. It continues the
14 lie that they were at fault, and places them yet again in
15 a very powerless position. Victims can't process their
16 trauma of the assault. Instead, they're forced to rebut
17 the false and disgusting notion that they asked for it.
18 That is 100 percent absurd. And that's what Cathy Ball
19 stood up and asked people to believe. No one consents to
20 rape, whether they take drugs or alcohol, by what they
21 wear, or where they are, or who they hang out with. It is
22 an absurd and a false notion perpetuated by rape culture,
23 and it has no place in public discourse. Victim blaming
24 is what Cathy Ball and Johnson City are doing in this
25 case. They want to do this to deflect from their own

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1 actions and what they didn't do. And make no mistake, it
2 is entirely utterly reprehensible. They are doing this
3 against incontrovertible proof. There's videos, there's
4 images, and Johnson City had a lot of this information in
5 their possession for a long time until the FBI obtained
6 the information again. By doing this, Johnson City,
7 sitting on evidence for years, they ineffectively dealt
8 with a serial rapist. And it's damaging not only to the
9 brave women that we're representing, but any other person
10 who is considering coming forward. Our clients
11 experienced one of the most egregious violations a person
12 can experience. They deserve justice and not blame.

13 Thank you.

14 MS. ELIZABETH KRAMER: Good afternoon everyone. My name is
15 Elizabeth Kramer, and I also represent the Plaintiffs in
16 this case. Expanding on Heather's discussion of how women
17 in Johnson City had the strength and bravery to come
18 forward to report their sexual assault, I'm going to
19 discuss why the survivors in this case use pseudonyms in
20 the lawsuit and why the case is filed as a class action.
21 First, Johnson City has claimed that because our clients
22 use Jane Doe names for the lawsuit, it can't respond to
23 the public's questions about the case. The City said it
24 would be, quote, "pure speculation" to explain what
25 happened to these Jane Does, even though the lawsuit

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1 provides detailed accounts of how each of these women was
2 drugged and raped by Sean Williams with no recourse by the
3 JCPD. Are there so many reports of women being drugged
4 and raped in Johnson City that a description of the
5 violence and naming your attacker is not enough? Does
6 Johnson City have so many women who have reported they
7 were raped by Sean Williams without investigation for
8 years that the City really does not know who the
9 Plaintiffs are in this case? The fact is Johnson City
10 does know, and they had evidence in graphic detail for
11 years, but chose not to act on it. Johnson City claimed
12 the Plaintiffs in this case want to remain anonymous for
13 legal reasons, as if this were a strategy to gain an
14 advantage in the lawsuit. But let's be very clear,
15 particularly because you will be hearing from these
16 survivors shortly, these women use pseudonyms because they
17 have a very real threat of retaliation. After Cathy Ball
18 gave the press conference in August promising safety for
19 women survivors, Williams escaped custody during a prison
20 transport and remained at large for over a month. The
21 pending complaint in this case is filed by three women who
22 are using their initials and prosecuting the case as
23 representative Plaintiffs on behalf of other survivors.
24 They may at some point reveal their identities, but that
25 will not undercut the choice, often the necessity, for

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1 women to be able to participate in this lawsuit
2 anonymously. Evidence is clear that Sean Williams drugged
3 and raped dozens of women, and could not have done so
4 without protection from JCPD officers. The Daigle Law
5 Group, paid for by the City itself, revealed over 250
6 instances of sexual assault reports that the JCPD
7 systematically refused to investigate, and sometimes
8 actively suppressed, all based on a practice of sex
9 discrimination. Part of that violence is feeling alone,
10 silenced, and not believed. This class action will be a
11 vehicle to allow many women, the dozens of Sean Williams'
12 survivors, and the hundreds of women who were harmed by
13 JCPD's discriminatory refusal to prosecute sex abuse to
14 vindicate their rights. Thank you.

15 MS. VANESSA BAEHR-JONES: The survivors will be joining us in
16 a moment. Some have decided to use their first names
17 today. Some have chosen not to identify themselves. Each
18 of them will give prepared remarks, and they will not be
19 taking questions. Thank you.

20 ***DOES ENTER THE PRESS CONFERENCE***

21 MS. VANESSA BAEHR-JONES: This is truly a momentous day for
22 the women you see in front of you. Their fight for
23 justice has already been a difficult one, and there is a
24 long road ahead. But today is a special day, for today it
25 is finally their turn to speak.

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JANE DOE: I am a plaintiff in the lawsuit against Johnson City, and I represent the sex trafficking survivor class. I am here today to respond to what Cathy Ball said about the victims in this case. I was working on Friday, August 25th when my father called me and asked whether I had seen the news. I had not. He then said, it's outrageous, they are painting the victims to be drug addicts. I was shocked, and immediately looked up the article and read it for myself. It was hurtful to read what Ms. Ball had said. After all the evidence that had come out about Sean Williams, evidence proving he had raped over 50 women and sexually exploited children, I thought the City might take some accountability. Instead, Ms. Ball justified their lack of action by pointing fingers at us, at the victims of his crimes. I did not take any drugs before I was raped. I had been offered a beer. My toxicology report showed that I had benzos in my system, which I never would have taken on my own free will, but that should not matter. Other women should not feel scared to come forward just because they might have made a mistake and taken drugs at his apartment. That does not mean it's all right for them to be raped or that they deserve zero empathy and no accountability. I am not just a survivor of Shawn Williams, I am also a mother, I am training as a

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1 nurse, and I'm a resident of Johnson City who deserved
2 better. I deserved justice, and I am here today because
3 all of the survivors in this case deserve justice. We
4 will not be silenced by victim blaming. Thank you.

5 *****

6 JANE DOE: My name is Cheney, and I am here today because no
7 survivor of sexual assault should feel alone. There is
8 power in standing together to demand change. No survivor
9 should feel ashamed. No survivor should feel guilty or at
10 fault for the crimes that were committed against them.
11 That is why I am speaking up today. What happened to me
12 was not my fault. If no one speaks up, how can we ever
13 change anything? Survivors deserve justice. Survivors
14 deserve accountability. No matter how much you want to
15 dehumanize me or any other survivor, I did not deserve to
16 be assaulted. There should never be an excuse for sexual
17 assault. Thank you.

18 *****

19 JANE DOE: I'm here today to respond to Cathy Ball. Even
20 words that are so obviously untrue, like hers, can still
21 cause harm, no matter what your role is, and especially if
22 you are in a position of power, your words matter.
23 Survivors deserve to be treated with respect. For a woman
24 in Cathy Ball's position of power to say publicly that
25 victims are at fault when we didn't have the ability to

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1 defend ourselves was a punch in the gut. No matter how
2 untrue or how ridiculous these words are, they still hold
3 the power to hurt. I'm here today to replace these words
4 with the truth. Our voices do matter and we are not at
5 fault. Thank you.

6 *****

7 JANE DOE: My name is Anya, and I am here today because a
8 predator was allowed to take advantage of people in
9 vulnerable situations for far longer than should have ever
10 happened. Sean Williams was manipulating people, people
11 who were vulnerable, who were disadvantaged, who may have
12 been struggling with addiction problems. I was struggling
13 with addiction when he victimized me, but I did not
14 deserve to be a target, and I certainly was not at fault.
15 People were scared to report to the police because they
16 had heard the police were doing nothing or worse. Victim
17 blaming is one of the main reasons that survivors are
18 afraid to come forward. It perpetuates rape culture. If
19 survivors are too scared that they will be blamed, they
20 will not be able to report their sexual assaults. I want
21 to give a voice to those who are too scared, who have not
22 been heard or listened to, or to the ones that are no
23 longer here to speak up for themselves. We are here to
24 get accountability. Thank you.

25 *****

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1 JANE DOE: I'm here on behalf of my sister, Laura Shea Trent.
2 She was a victim of Sean Williams who did not survive. If
3 the Johnson City Police Department had done their jobs,
4 my sister would have never met Sean Williams on the night
5 of November 10th, 2020. If the Johnson City Police
6 Department had done their jobs, Sean Williams would have
7 been in jail a long time before she met him. Immediately
8 after my sister died, I asked the Johnson City Police
9 Department to investigate. They did nothing. My family
10 has experienced heartache watching as the system designed
11 to protect and serve this community has let us down time
12 and time again. Now we have nothing but memories of
13 Laura. We will miss her every day. Law enforcement
14 protected an evil predator at my sister's expense. I
15 boldly stand beside the victims today to encourage them in
16 their fight for justice. And if you were targeted by Sean
17 Williams, I want you to know it was not your fault.
18 Nothing my sister did made her at fault. Nothing
19 justified Sean Williams targeting her that night. The
20 city manager stood up and claimed it was because of an, in
21 quote, "lack of training" that Sean Williams was allowed
22 to terrorize our city. My family and I do not accept that
23 answer. Let's be clear, we've alleged it was corruption.
24 As citizens of this community, we expect and deserve
25 justice so no other family should ever have to endure the

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1 tragedy of what we have been through. My sister's life
2 mattered. We will stand on what is right and we will not
3 stop fighting on Laura's behalf. Thank you.

4 *****

5 MS. VANESSA BAEHR-JONES: I'm going to read a short statement
6 on behalf of Kimberly Trent. My daughter is so much more
7 than a Jane Doe. Her name is Laura Shea. She was here
8 and lived a life with family and friends who loved her
9 dearly. She has the most beautiful soul. She is my baby
10 girl. Today I stand here and I ask why. Why was this
11 ever allowed to happen? Why was this monster allowed to
12 roam our streets for my child to ever meet Sean Williams
13 that night? Had Johnson City Police Department done their
14 due diligence and got him off the street when they should
15 have, she would never have met him. I want to know why.
16 Why was evil protected and not my beautiful baby girl?
17 She deserved so much better from the ones that we look to
18 protect us. Why did they fail to protect her? I stand
19 here in solidarity with all the survivors and all the
20 survivors out there who may not have yet come forward. We
21 fight on your behalf.

22 *****

23 JANE DOE: I was at home when I first saw the article about
24 Cathy Ball's press conference. I read Ms. Ball's words
25 that the victims were, quote-unquote, "comparatively at

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1 fault" for their, quote-unquote, "mistaken judgment".
2 I was outraged and I was distraught. I am one of the 52
3 women whom Sean Williams sexually assaulted while taking
4 sexually explicit photographs of me. My name also appears
5 on the raped list, which Johnson City Police Department
6 recovered from Sean Williams' apartment. They took no
7 action when they found that list. Instead, they dismissed
8 credible reports made by other rape victims. The people
9 in my community who are supposed to protect me, and the
10 other women you see here today, failed us. I did not
11 deserve to be victimized by Sean Williams no matter what I
12 drank or what I consumed the evening that I was there. I
13 was not comparatively at fault. I was not in fault in any
14 way. When Cathy Ball said that victims may be
15 comparatively at fault, she's participating in a very
16 dangerous game of victim blaming. This assumes that the
17 false idea that bad things only happen to bad people.
18 This false narrative lets people in power off of the hook
19 for protecting everyone, which is their civic duty. It's
20 intended to discredit victims and discourage women from
21 coming forward. Victims of Sean Williams deserved
22 protection from sexual violence, regardless of whether
23 they drank alcohol, took illicit drugs, or otherwise. No
24 one signs up to be raped. Thank you.


25 *****

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1 MS. VANESSA BAEHR-JONES: I want to thank each of these women
2 for their bravery and incredible courage in speaking
3 publicly for the first time about what they've been
4 through, what their family member has been through. What
5 tremendous voices they have. I know they hope that their
6 words will bring healing and comfort to other survivors
7 out there who may have also been victimized by Sean
8 Williams. Please know that we bring this case on your
9 behalf, too. As I said, this is a long fight, but I
10 believe that what we conveyed today is our resolve in the
11 face of injustice. We will not be deterred by victim
12 blaming or bullying. We will stand strong. Thank you,
13 and thank you.
14 JANE DOES: Thank you.
15 MS. VANESSA BAEHR-JONES: We will not take questions.

THIS CONCLUDES THE TRANSCRIPT OF
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BY: 
Rebecca Overbey
Licensed Court Reporter

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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Rebecca Overbey, Licensed Court Reporter in and for the State of Tennessee, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and complete

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the same transcribed to the best of my ability and understanding at the request of counsel from a recording provided to me. I, Rebecca Overbey, was not present, nor did I have an agent present for this press conference.

WITNESS my hand and official seal at my office in Kingsport, (Sullivan County) Tennessee on this the 10th day of May, 2024.



Rebecca Overbey

Rebecca Overbey
LICENSED COURT REPORTER
State of Tennessee
LCR #078

My License Expires:

June 30, 2026

CERTIFIED ONLY IF AFFIXED SEAL IS GREEN